

The Policy Dimensions of the Context of Reception for Immigrants and Latinos in the Midwest

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Research Report No. 47

August 2011

ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is legislation in Midwestern states passed between January 2009 and June 2010 in relation to immigrants. Recent enacted legislation is a reflection of concrete efforts to influence how immigrants should be or are being received into communities; whether they should be excluded, ignored or integrated. The research question addressed is: What state-wide legislative policies are shaping the contexts of reception for Latino immigrants across the Midwestern states? A context of reception can be integrating, passively accepting, or exclusionary. We used content analysis of enacted immigration legislation in the Midwest and organized them into three categories: integrating, exclusionary or neutral, each with points of significant and moderate values, and neutral tending toward one or the other categories. Results show that of the policies that were enacted in 2009 and the first half of 2010, forty four laws were found to be integrating, thirty nine laws were exclusionary, and twelve laws were neutral. Illinois is the most inclusive state in the Midwest, and has the largest Latino population in the region. North Dakota and Michigan are moderately integrating, Kansas and Ohio are inclusive-neutral, South Dakota and Wisconsin are basically neutral, Minnesota and Indiana are exclusionary neutral, Missouri is moderately exclusionary, and Iowa and Nebraska are the most exclusionary. The data suggest that Midwestern states are situated across the full spectrum between inclusive and exclusive positions, and that the policy environment is very dynamic, especially given the results of the 2010 election. When it comes to the context of reception, the Midwest has been “on the fence,” but is tending toward stronger exclusionary state policy stances.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Rubén Martínez is the director of JSRI at Michigan State University. He is a nationally known scholar with expertise in the areas of higher education, race, and ethnic relations and diversity leadership. His areas of specialization include leadership and institutional change, education and ethnic minorities, youth development, and environmental justice.

Dr. Jennifer Tello Buntin received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago in 2010. In her research, she examines the ways that receiving community institutions transform in response to the presence of a transnational immigrant population. Her work investigates the ways that assimilation and transnationalism may occur simultaneously and the implications of this for both immigrant and non-immigrant residents.

William Escalante is a doctoral student in Sociology at MSU. His interests include migration, culture, race/ethnicity, identity, collective consciousness, and Chicano/Latino communities in the United States. His current project is on cultural practices of immigrants of Mexican Ancestry in the United States.